

LIFELONG INTEGRATED EDUCATION – THE WEST VS. THE EAST MODEL

Maria Tzonkova

„Permanent Education” – Civic Organization

Abstract. A model of an eastern educational philosophy is described which can help with its ideas of a strategic reform in the already existing Bulgarian educational system.

The “Nomura” basic philosophical principles of lifelong integrated education are based on the eastern view of nature and that of the human being as an integrated part of nature because of the concept and belief that the essential task of education is the restoration of humanity.

With the Principles of Lifelong Integrated Education, any individual can achieve character building in the organic cooperation of family, school and society and promote mutual education based on the principle of self-education.

Keywords: educational reform, lifelong education, lifelong integrated education, human being, holistic education

Lifelong integrated education (LIE) is a contemporary educational theory based on the oriental view of nature and the human being. Its author, the Japanese Yoshiko Nomura (1922-2003) began to create, develop, put it into practice, and disseminate it during the second half of the 20th c. Later, on the basis of the experience gained over the years, she published it in a book issued as a textbook in two volumes, in 1996 and 2001, respectively. It has been translated into English and Arabic, and in 2010 it was also released in Bulgarian.

LIE is the main philosophy and driving force behind the work of the Nomura Center for Lifelong Integrated Education in Tokyo, established as a foundation in 1962. In the 1970s, it was authorized by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, Culture and Technology in Japan, and has been one of its major advisory organizations since then.

LIE is mainly applied in an informal setting through lectures and the preparation and organization of courses in civil education, seminars and other similar forms of dissemination. National conferences are held annually, and every month seminars of the leaders and representatives of the Tokyo branches take place. Over recent years, however, the interest in it has been increasing and it often spreads to institutions via

the mediation of civic and non-governmental organizations in lecture format or as informal meetings.

Gradually the foundation expanded both on national and international level – it maintains contact and partnership with organizations and institutions in over 80 countries, among which universities, institutions, and organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, ratified by Kennedy in 1961, one of the most powerful political and economic organizations with 34 member-states.

The center has four branches across the world – in Germany, Palestine, India and Bulgaria, where it is represented by the civic organization “Permanent Education”.

Since 1982 the foundation has been conducting international forums on LIE every four years in Paris, under the auspices of and in the headquarters of UNESCO.

The great attractiveness of the philosophy for many people is owed to its exceptional relevance to the problems in a world pacing fast towards globalization. It sends clear, simple and logical messages to every human being irrespective of their geographic origin or social status, and that relates it more and more to real life. It not only educates but also persuades people to believe in common human values, and that makes it deeply humanistic, oriented towards the achievement of fundamental change, but also towards a more general, renaissance-like reform in mass education.

Its main goal is, through education, to make people more responsible for what they do both in their private lives, and in the public sphere, and to develop their social activity and learn to cherish peace and tolerance, which would lead them towards a happier life of dignity on a planet no longer threatened by self-destruction.

The theory has three main ideas which define it in the sphere of education for the restoration of humanity; it is directed towards the socialization of individuals by the encouragement of volunteering and by developing their sense of acting inside a community:

- educational reform;
- holistic development of the person and understanding of the common human values;
- educational principles derived from the laws of nature.

Educational Reform

For reform to begin in the institutions, “a clear and comprehensive new way of thinking, starting from the very OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION” should be established in the contents and methodology of education (Y. Nomura).

Education in its essentials is an opportunity to “nurture human thought and personal development. Its broader role also includes a contribution to the creation of new cultures and civilizations, and the definition of new directions in certain

historical periods. The existing framework of institutional education can no longer deal with the numerous problems of fast-developing human society. It is necessary to break away from the narrow understanding of education as a process concentrated in the school and based on the traditional stress laid on the acquisition of scientific knowledge” (Y. Nomura).

An analogy can be drawn to the “construction of ten new stories on top of the foundation of a one-story building. The additional stories cannot be erected on a foundation fit for one. In the same way, new objectives cannot be achieved if the foundation of the initial objective is not analyzed and reconstructed in advance” (Y. Nomura).

LIE prepares individuals for the understanding of the true authentic objectives of education as a public phenomenon and gives them an opportunity to develop in compliance with them.

The theory defines four basic pillars of the new concept of education:

- From knowledge-based education to an education which analyses knowledge and nurtures wisdom.
- From knowledge-centered education to holistic education.
- From teaching traditional culture to creating a new culture.
- From time-bound education to lifelong integrated education.

The word “integration” in the term lifelong integrated education distinguishes it from the familiar lifelong learning or education, as well as from what we usually understand as integration and education. The focus is not on the integration through education or into the educational system of minority groups, disadvantaged children or children with disabilities, although this type of integration is also part of its philosophy. Integration here refers mainly to:

I. Internal, individual integration inside the person of four basic components –

- education at home;
- school or university education;
- social awareness and education;
- attitude towards nature.

There is awareness of this internal integration and it is developed throughout the individual’s life. The earlier children are taught and educated in integrated education, the easier and more natural it is for them to develop a capacity for self-education and self-learning later in life, an individual skill of great importance for every human being in the world of globalization.

II. Integration between western rationality and oriental wisdom, between the center and the periphery in governmental processes and any other type of integration, which can synthesize and yield positive results under different conditions.

The main objective of education in LIE is:

- to help in the recognition of the inherent positive potential in the human being, in its development throughout life, at the same time encouraging the attempts to recognize and suppress the negative potential, which every human being also has.

- to help in “raising” the spirit above daily needs, likes and dislikes, prejudices and complexes.

- to help in the “understanding” of individuals of their own role in their well-being, happiness and dignity, and in the common welfare, and to motivate them to work towards achieving it /volunteering/.

- to teach tolerance and peace.

Seen from that point of view, the contents of the teaching materials, in the schools rather than in the university, need extensive reconsideration, and the teacher’s role should be placed at a much higher level than the current one, where he or she only teaches factual knowledge in unnecessary quantity and detail.

Holistic Development of the Individual and Recognition of Shared Values

This is the basis of the LIE concept, which has been developed around the following main aspects:

- The man as a part of nature;
- The laws of nature and their relationship to the man;
- The place of the man in the system of nature;
- The concept of life;
- The essence of human nature (inner qualities);
- Main qualities and values of the human being.

The Man as a part of nature

The idea at the heart of LIE is the attitude towards nature, which is founded on Japanese tradition and culture. The oriental philosophy of nature and that of the West differ greatly. While the western philosophy can best be defined as “man against nature”, the oriental philosophy is best described as “man in nature” or as ‘man and nature as one.’ Man is seen as a manifestation of life in nature. This monistic concept of man inseparable from all other living beings or from inanimate matter and energy is the oriental philosophy of nature and man. This viewpoint displaces the idea of man as center. It is where the idea of “life with nature” originates. The view which places man against nature is the origin of the philosophy of “conquering nature.” One supports the principles of life with nature, and the other supports the conquest of it. This is the main difference between the oriental view of nature and that of the West. This difference is the source of many discrepancies in the way in which we see things. The two philosophies arising from these radically different viewpoints have a significant impact on the future of the world. Man as part of nature includes the concept of man against nature.

The laws of nature and their relationship to the man

As a part of nature, human beings are the subject of the impact of the laws of nature not only biologically, but also in their interaction with other people and relations to the rest of the natural world. Like everything else in nature, the man

has a form and contents – the visible and invisible aspect of the individual which defines his or her personality.

From the point of view of the form, the exterior and visible aspect of the human being, the oriental philosophy teaches that in nature the man and all other living beings, matter, and energy are interconnected.

This is the inviolable law of interdependence. According to this law, all things are connected simultaneously and sequentially. For example, simultaneous interdependence is: life – air – water, etc.

Sequential interdependence is: seed-root-stem-leaves-blossom-fruit; father and mother – child, etc.

With regard to the invisible aspect of the nature of human beings, it is manifested in all their actions dictated by their way of thinking and perception of the world around them. This is how causal relations form, which, in accordance with the law of interdependence, spread in space, i.e. in the natural world surrounding man and since man is part of nature, the result of these actions sooner or later affects people and everything else.

The place of the human being in nature

LIE provides a very clear picture of the place of man in the natural world by outlining it in a diagram. The law of interdependence is projected upon the human relations in time and space, and defines the place of the individual in the world of nature and in time. The tools provided by the philosophy make self-identification for every human being very clear and logical.

The sequential interdependence determines man's place in time. Life is transmitted and taken forward. Every human being has parents, who have their parents, each of whom also has parents, etc. back in time to infinity. The individual life is part of an endless chain of parents, children and their children, a chain of generations, repeating the process from beginning to end, /i.e. birth and death in every individual life/ without disrupting its continuity. Achieving awareness of this fact gives one an opportunity to realize the true value of life. Every human being is a carrier of this value, transmits it in time and is responsible for it. Therefore, it has to be appreciated and respected in every human being. The diagram represents sequential interdependence in time by a vertical axis.

Simultaneous interdependence, on the other hand, is represented in the diagram by a horizontal axis. It shows man's place in space. Every human being was born at a particular time somewhere in the world – Europe, Asia, Africa, America, etc., under certain conditions, characterizing their place of birth. It leaves its imprint on the individual forever. He or she is simultaneously and continuously dependent on other people and all other creations of nature. The mind, body and the environment represent an interdependent and indelible whole. This is the law of inseparability of subject and object.

The point of intersection of the vertical axis (time) and the horizontal axis (space) represents every individual. Every human being can achieve self-awareness and recognize his or her own identity using this philosophical but easily accessible method.

The concept of life

LIE defines four characteristics of life from the perspective of the oriental view of nature, which sees all things as a part of the sole power of life, including the individual who has been developing in time and space after the first appearance of primitive life on Earth.

Historical continuity

Strong capacity for regeneration

Accumulated cultural heritage

Mystical mechanism of life.

The real nature of the human being

The essence of the human nature is that permanent invisible life which stands behind the visible tangible form and image. The intrinsic nature is the invisible aspect of the individual, which causes every phenomenon and determines its specific characteristics, so that they are no longer separable from the phenomenon itself.

Since the inner qualities of the human beings, unlike their material existence, are not visible to the eye, main principles should be established with regard to the way people see and perceive the environment around them, and their way of thinking.

Ancient oriental philosophy defines three concepts as principles of seeing things in the “right” way. They are as follows:

Principle of difference and otherness;

Principle of equality;

Principle of integration.

These three principles are the most important conditions for clarifying the nature of things, including people, events and phenomena.

The observation of the tangible world from the point of view of “difference and otherness” and “change” (main aspects of the world of phenomena) is called “the principle of difference and otherness”. Every being and phenomenon, whether animate or inanimate, is literally different. All things have aspects that distinguish them, which explains their uniqueness. They interact by changing and change by interacting in the course of time. All things exist in a network of mutual dependence.

The concept of “difference and otherness” is usually used and understood negatively as implying “discrimination”, but in terms of acknowledging the infinitely varied characteristics of everything in the natural world, this is the way of perceiving the world as it is. This is reality, which is neither good, nor bad.

The notion of difference is the evidence of constantly changing appearance which is wrongly considered as the transient nature of all things but in fact reveals their essence. When there is artificial discrimination that which is by nature a neutral element of difference receives negative connotation of “to discriminate” or “to be discriminated against.” This is analogous to the fact that the laws of science are neither good, nor bad, but can be applied negatively if abused.

Difference exists in the real sense of the word before the “Ego”, the “I” becomes aware of it. It exists independently of the way people perceive it or are able to understand it. The impossibility to accept it for what it is due to the fact that people see through the prism of their egotistic prejudice, likes and dislikes, values and needs, possible gains and primitive survival mechanisms inherited from their ancestors. The difficulty to see in the right way, to observe objectively, is the result of seeing things through the glasses of egocentric subjectivism stemming from “falling into the trap of all difference in the phenomenal world.” This is how a “discriminatory behavior” arises – whenever, upon judging a given object, the subject attributes to it their own qualities and desires.

The ability to discriminate among things is equal to the ability to accept difference in nature. Discriminatory attitude, in contrast, means to fall victim to one’s own ego.

The principle of equality is related to the understanding of the invariable aspect, which, according to oriental philosophy, is at the core of all phenomena. Human beings, for example, have their specific features and different skills, everyone being a distinct person in different surroundings. They all exist separately and in different ways. Still, since they are all humans, they are equal in terms of their essential value, namely that they represent the dignity of life. According to oriental wisdom, the world of phenomena originated from the cosmic void, where the undifferentiated absolute exists, without discrimination and change. The principle of equality would be wrongly applied if the individual qualities and skills were denied. All things are equal in their essence but different in form and quality. Equality without “difference” is misunderstood equality, and “difference” without equality is discrimination; both situations clearly demonstrate some people’s failure to accept nature for what it really is. The principle of equality teaches the importance of understanding that everyone, whoever they are, carries the positive essence of the human being, whose source is one and the same – the miracle of life.

The “principle of integration” treats things comprehensively by incorporating the principle of difference and otherness and the one of equality. One’s attitude begins to change when one learns to see things in the right way, i.e. by achieving an understanding of equality based on the deep awareness of the principle of

difference and otherness. These three principles are of primary importance, especially when one is faced with the challenge of discovering and grasping the essential nature of the human being.

Main qualities and values of the human being

The inner value which each human being carries from birth as a creation of the universe is an inborn quality, not acquired or obtained in an artificial manner. This value has a completely different dimension from that of man's abilities or physical characteristics on the relative level. This is a natural quality which is equal for all of us and is not defined by more or less in terms of quantity. Its characteristics are:

DIGNITY – as a carrier of the most precious value, life, it exists in every human being.

EQUALITY – the equality of all human beings with regard to their essential value has been proven by the course of the historical evolution since the origin of life in times immemorial – it is inviolable for every human being.

FREEDOM – man is the product of the fundamental cosmic energy and as such is endowed with free will, part of the cosmic will.

That is why people risk their life in order to protect their dignity, equality and freedom.

Saints and philosophers defined the contents of the main human values still back in time. These values are LOVE, WISDOM and CREATION. They all represent the workings of nature. The processes of never-ending growth and evolution, shared by all living organisms, are the result of love and creation. The cosmic system which represents a mega harmony of all phenomena, functioning according to a specific order and rules in strict distribution of labour and cooperation, from the cells in the micro universe is wisdom itself, the cosmic reason which defies human knowledge and reasoning.

Human history abounds with, along with highly humane phenomena, cases of mass annihilation as the result of wars and trends which disregard human life, for example suicides and murders, and many other social phenomena that seriously infringe upon the dignity, sense of equality and freedom of many people around the world. Therefore, according to LIE, people should restore their humanity. The most important qualities and inherent features one is born with should be revived. The return to the womb of nature is the greatest duty of humankind in the 21st century.

LIE has formulated three major principles of human relations that apply to life today:

- The education of the children includes the self-education of the parents;
- The education of students is the self-education of the teachers;
- Every human being, as member of a community, is narrowly linked to the politics, economy, and society, and has to accept all that as a source of knowledge about their own education.

Yoshiko Nomura says: “One of my favourite mottos is: everything in life is for self-education. That means that I accept everything, even the problems I encounter in life as material from which I can learn to be a better person. Naturally, I can choose to suffer and feel dissatisfied because of my problems or, as I have already said, to accept it as an opportunity for my improvement as a person. The choice one makes at such a moment has a great impact on one’s attitude to life and to oneself.

In March 2012, the Nomura Center for LIE celebrated its 50th anniversary. This long period of time places it alongside the first organisations with significant experience, which have devoted their activities to the achievement of lasting peace all over the world, the well-being and happiness of the human race. They are not only among the pioneers, but unfortunately among the very few organisations in the world of this size and driven by such goals.

Between the first Adult Education World Conference in Montreal, Canada, organised by UNESCO in 1960, via the First International Forum on LIE in 1977, held in Tokyo under the motto: “As a Global-minded Person, as a Human Being” to the International Conference in 2012 under to motto: “Happiness and Well-being: Defining a New Economic Paradigm”, a topic discussed at a UN summit, the world has gone a long way. We have nevertheless witnessed recurrent crises, terrorist attacks, local wars, social paradoxes, serious harm caused to nature and the human spirit. This proves how difficult and slow the process is of changing the way people think and the values that govern their actions. The highest value of our times, the acquisition of material wealth“ no longer makes economic sense because it causes the irresponsibility, immorality, and self-destructive actions of people”. (2012, Tinely, Prime Minister of Butan).

However, the experience of such educational institutions and their achievements bring hope and optimism, because it clearly demonstrates the success of targeted education and teaching of people throughout their lives about socialisation through a deeper awareness of shared human values. This is also the main goal of education as a whole, according to LIE.

ИНТЕГРИРАНОТО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ – МОДЕЛ „ИЗТОК-ЗАПАД”

Резюме. В материала се представя модел на източна образователна философия, която може да послужи с идеите си за стратегическа реформа в съществуващата българска образователна система.

Основните философски принципи „Номура“ за интегрирано образование през целия живот са извлечени от източното схващане за природата и

човека като интегрална част от нея, заради схващането и убеждението, че основната задача (цел) на образованието е развитието на човешката личност и утвърждаването на общочовешките ценности (възстановяване на човечността).

С принципите на интегрираното образование през целия живот всеки индивид може да постигне изграждане на характера си в органична връзка със семейството, училището и да даде възможност за взаимно образование на базата на принципа на самообразованието.

Maria Tzonkova

✉ President of the Civic Organization „Permanent Education“
157, G. Rakovski Str.
1000, Sofia, Bulgaria
E-mail: manya_t2002@yahoo.com